

CHAPTER III

HIS CHARACTERS



In a character of Greene, there are always two persons : the inner man and the outer one ; these two selves are completely separated. In The Man Within, Andrews "was, he knew, embarrassingly made up of two persons, the sentimental, bullying child and another more stern critic ... Always while one part of him spoke, another part stood on one side and wondered 'Is this I who am speaking ?'"¹ He does not really exist, until he is truly attentive to the inner critic. Andrews is able to catch a glimpse in Elizabeth of "the promise of his two selves at once, the peace which he had discovered sometimes in music."² Bendrix, in The End of the Affair, is made aware of the same truth by Sarah. "The saints, one would suppose, in a sense create themselves. They come alive. They are capable of the surprising act or word. They stand outside the plot, unconditioned by it. But we have to be pushed around. We have the obstinacy of non-existence."³ But the inner self is given in the form of potentialities ; these are revealed in dreams, which he alone can know. Others judge him by what they see : "How could one judge a man, when all was said, but by his body and his private acts, not by dreams he followed in the world's eye ?"⁴ In the process of discovering what we are, we at the same time create ourselves ; choosing to be what we really are, beyond the passing impulse of the moment, we realize our potentialities, which until then have no positive value. Thus, by constant attention to the inner call and with the courage to answer it, even the coward may be turned into a hero.⁵ In The Power and the Glory, the priest seems at first

¹Graham Greene, The Man Within, p. 45.

²Ibid., p. 46.

³Graham Greene, The End of the Affair, p. 186.

⁴Marie Béatrice Mesnet, Graham Greene and the Heart of the Matter (London : The Cresset Press, 1954), p. 46.



a coward ; he is escaping. But when a dying man wants a confession, he goes to him though he knows that it is a risk to his life. He becomes a hero in a way because he acts according to his conscience, to his own inner voice.

In Brighton Rock, Ida Arnold says that "man is made by the places in which he lives".⁶ This statement could be applied to most of Greene's characters. Pinkie, the whiskey-priest and Scobie are trapped in their environment, which contributes to their personality and colours their existence.

Brighton is Pinkie's world ; everywhere else he would be a stranger. The tripper's eye sees, when Brighton is at its best, with the Bank holiday crowds or at the races, only bright sunshine on an ignorant world and the gaudy setting of a popular summer resort ; a cosmopolitan scene where people of all sorts come down for week-ends to make love in hotel bedrooms and to enjoy the fun, walking on the Front, entering the Palace of Pleasure, with shooting booths, band-stands and miniature cars tearing round the curve, looking at the sea "stretched like a piece of gay common washing on a tenement square across the end of a street."⁷ But to Pinkie, Brighton is hell. "Why, this is Hell, nor are we out of it."⁸ The sea washes round the piles at the end of the pier, dark poison green."⁹ His world is lawless. Hale knows that "this was real now : the boy, the razor cut, life going out with the blood in pain."¹⁰ Murder waits for him under "the little covered arcade where the cheap shops stood between the sea and the stone wall, selling Brighton Rock."¹¹

In Brighton, the "place of accidents and unexplained events," Kite picked him up on the Palace Pier. He had been killed, but the boy had prolonged his existence, "not touching liquor, biting his nails in the Kite way."¹²

⁶Graham Greene, Brighton Rock, p. 37.

⁷Ibid., p. 101.

⁸Ibid., p. 212.

⁹Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 106.

¹¹Ibid., p. 107

¹²Ibid., pp. 166 - 167.

taking his place in the large room used as head-quarters for the mob. "It had been as if a father had died, leaving him an inheritance it was his duty never to leave for strange acres."¹³ In this lawless Brighton, Kite's death starts the long chain of murders, committed by Pinkie.

Pinkie is bound by his experience and his environment, which make him unfit to conceive anything but hell: "Credo in unum Satanum." He feels, in a moment of awareness, that he has not had his chance and "seen his glimpse of heaven if only a crack between the Brighton walls ... Rose might be it - but the brain could not conceive."¹⁴

The Power and the Glory takes place in Tabasco, Mexico. In Tabasco, no churches remain standing; nothing is left but the heat, the vultures looking for carrion, the swamps and the puritan shabby capital where all lights are out by nine-thirty, and alcohol is prohibited. There is solitude and decay: "We have been deserted."¹⁵ In The Lawless Roads Greene himself felt "that this wasn't a country to live in at all with the heat and the desolation; it was a country to die in and leave only ruins behind."¹⁶ In this land, "the only place where you can find some symbol of your faith is in the cemetery up on a hill above the town,"¹⁷ where you get the sense of a "far better and cleaner city than of the living at the bottom of the hill."¹⁸ Twice in the book we catch a glimpse of the comparatively free and sinless world on the other side of the border. It seems to be introduced solely to emphasize the horror and the abandonment as well as the greater reality of the "walled in" world, from which there are only two ways of escape. The hunted priest tries them both; when the

¹³Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 212.

¹⁵Graham Greene, The Power and the Glory, p. 13.

¹⁶Graham Greene, The Lawless Roads, p. 96.

¹⁷Graham Greene, The Power and the Glory, p. 20.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 20.

story opens, he has come down to the port, in one of his periodical attempts to take the boat for "the forty-two hours in the Gulf to Vera - Cruz." But for the last time he is driven back to the darkness inland, the heat, the heavy air, while on the General Obregon a faint breeze begins to blow.

In this dark state of Mexico, children mature too young. Brigida has an old-young face. Being the daughter of the whiskey-priest who does no work, other children make fun of her. She feels bitter ; she hates the world. Coral belongs to the world ; she is conscious of heavy responsibilities. She has an intent mind and passionate nature. She is able to detect a sign of greatness in the whiskey-priest. While her body comes to maturity, her heart, controlled by a simple acceptance of men and things, is ready to receive God. Children with bellies swollen from eating earth and by worms ; the small boy with brown eyes waiting with infinite patience for the priest to come to his dying mother ; the boy repelled by the pious story read to him by his mother, but welcoming the new priest at the end of the book ; the dead child buried like a dog, without a prayer, and the baby killed by the gringo ; they are all innocents caught in the great turmoil and expressing the tragedy of the land they live in, "waiting through the dry months and the rains for the footstep, the voice, 'Is it easier to say your sin be forgiven you ... ?'"¹⁹

The whiskey-priest was the only priest left in the state. He becomes a priest because of the environment. Being the son of a store keeper, he sees the hardship and the misery of the life of the peons. He had looked for some easier ways to security than the calculation and risks of a business career. To the child there seemed no easier way

¹⁹Ibid., p. 90.

than the priesthood. " It had been a happy childhood, except that he had been afraid of too many things, and had hated poverty like a crime : he had believed that when he was a priest he would be rich and proud - that was called having a vocation."²⁰ First he was successful. But when his environment is changed, with the state trying to abolish the Church, he has to escape and say Mass in secret for ten years.

The Heart of the Matter takes place on the west coast of Africa. The British have brought their civilization to this colony, a home from home. Greene in Journey Without Maps says that : " This was an English capital city; England had planted this town, the tin shacks and the Remembrance Day posters, and had then withdrawn up the hillside to smart bungalows, with wide windows and electric fans and perfect service."²¹ The headquarters of the Empire have sent to the outposts men who were given " a feeling of respectability and a sense of fairness withering in the heat."²² The impression gathered by a tourist passing through Freetown before the war was one of complete lack of adaptation to the natives' world. The apparent order is but a rhetorical conception. The law defended by Scobie is fake, "with no connection with morals or justice." The grandiloquent boast of the police station is only one room deep : it conceals human meanness and injustice. People rot, like books ; their age here is told by their years of service. "It's a climate for meanness, malice, snobbery, but anything like hate or

²⁰Ibid., p. 148.

²¹Graham Greene, Journey Without Maps, p. 14.

²²Ibid., p. 15.

love drives a man off his head."²³ Such is the world in which Scobie had lived for fifteen years, first alone, then with a wife.

In this kind of society, people know each other very well. If this story had taken place in England, the fact that Scobie is passed over may not affect Louise as much as this. But here she cannot bear the situation ; she cannot face "her friends." She wants a holiday in South Africa. This circumstance forces Scobie to borrow money from Yusef, a Syrian trader. While Louise was away, there was a ship-wreck. Scobie meets a young widow and falls in love with her. If his wife had been at home, this affair might not have taken place. His love letter to Helen falls into the hand of Yusef who uses it to blackmail him. He has to smuggle diamonds for this evil trader. At last, being desperate, he commits suicide. Scobie is an honest man who becomes corrupt and meets his downfall because of his environment.

In The Confidential Agent, because of her environment, Else meets corruption too early around her and is finally killed by a mad woman. In A Gun for Sale, Raven has a father who is sent to prison and a mother who cuts her throat with a carving knife. His environment is so unpleasant that he says "this isn't a world I'd bring children into ..."²⁴

Greene's characters also act according to their natures. In Brighton Rock, Pinkie's nature is evil. He explains to Rose : "It's in the blood. Perhaps when they christened me, the holy water didn't take. I never howled the devil out."²⁵ But evil alone may not enable Pinkie to

²³Ibid., p. 20.

²⁴Graham Greene, A Gun for Sale, p. 124.

do a lot of evil things, there is another motive, that is fear.

Pinkie is dominated by fear. He fears that he may be done for. He fears to see "an end to the great future"²⁶ when the Inspector takes him to ^{the} charge-room simply to advise him to clear out of Brighton. He fears Ida pursuing him, robbing him of safety. He fears pain and death when Coleoni's men attack him. The fear seizes him when Spicer, whom he supposes dead, is heard on the floor above.

Fear impels Pinkie to commit further evil. Finding that Spicer is still alive, Pinkie murders him. Also, in order to make Rose unable to act against him, Pinkie marries her.

If he married her, of course, it wouldn't be for long : only as a last resort to close her mouth and give him time. He didn't want that relationship with anyone :...²⁷

After the wedding-night, he feels a sense of triumph : he had graduated in the last human shame.

He had a sense that he would never be scared again : running down from the track he had been afraid, afraid of pain and more afraid of damnation - of the sudden and unshriven death. . Now it was as if he was damned already and there was nothing more to fear over again.²⁸

But the fear of drowning overwhelms him in a nightmare the same night and he wakes to realize with horror that there is no end to what he has done.

²⁶Ibid., p. 121.

²⁷Ibid., p. 101 - 102.

²⁸Ibid., p. 113.

Our last sight of him is that of a " schoolboy flying in panic and pain, scrambling over a fence, running on ... whipped away into zero -- nothing."²⁹

When Pinkie hates Rose and inflicts pain, he is in fact hating and hurting himself, because she represents his lost goodness, his true self. He revenges himself on her for his own failure. His evil calls for her goodness.³⁰ The power that compels him to accept the eternal damnation of both of them as the price of his temporal safety is satanic. As Bendrix perceived in The End of the Affair :

If there is a God who uses us and makes his saints out of such material as we are, the devil too may have his ambition ; he may dream of training even such a person as myself into being his saint, ready with borrowed fanaticism to destroy love wherever we find it.³¹

The whiskey-priest in The Power and the Glory is another human failure and a greater sinner. This is partly because of his weak nature. He becomes a priest because he is afraid of the hardship of life. When the state is abolishing the Church, he is the only priest left. Alone in the Godless state, with no one to ask advice from, the priest is gradually led to mortal sin and to the complete disintegration of his being. He had not taken into account his fundamental weakness and fear of pain. After ten years of this kind of life, when the final hunt begins to close all the ways of escape against him, he considers the immeasurable distance a man travels.

²⁹Ibid., p. 179.

³⁰Marie Beatrice Mesnet, Graham Greene and the of the Matter, p. 53.

³¹Graham Greene, The End of the Affair, p. 179.

" Ten years behind him were littered with surrenders - feast days and fast days and days of abstinence had been the first to go : then he had ceased to trouble more than occasionally about his breviary - and finally he had left it behind altogether at the port in one of his periodic attempts at escape. ... He was a bad priest, he knew it : they had a word for his kind - a whiskey priest, but every failure dropped out of sight and mind : somewhere they accumulated in secret - the rubble of his failures."³²

From weariness and fear he weeps when a man asks him to hear the people of the community in confession. "Oh, let them come. Let them come", he cries angrily. "I am your servant."³³ Weariness invades him every time he thinks that death is at hand and he must still go on living. " God had decided. He had to go on with life, go on making decisions, acting on his own advice, making plans."³⁴ When he escapes at last across the border, he finds himself being drawn back to his old life, as if his experience of hardship had taught him nothing. Once again he is bargaining in his patronizing voice about the price of baptism, once again he is respected and successful, as in the old days, and conscious of the returning habit of piety, but apparently unable to control himself, unable to throw off the habit of drink.

" He told himself-in time it will be all right, I shall pull up, I only ordered three bottles this time. They will be the last I'll ever drink, I won't need drink there - he knew he lied."³⁵

He is constantly aware of the extent of his degradation, of being in a state of mortal sin, of carrying hell about with him, of evil running "like malaria" in his veins

³²Graham Greene, The Power and the Glory, p. 139.

³³Ibid., p. 85.

³⁴Ibid., p. 150.

³⁵Ibid., p. 153.

and filling his dreams with satanic images.

"He remembered a dream he had of a big grassy arena lined with the statues of the saints - but the saints were alive, they turned their eyes this way and that, waiting for something. He waited, too, with an awful expectancy : bearded Peters and Pauls, with Bibles pressed to their breasts, watched some entrance behind his back he couldn't see - it had the menace of a beast. Then a marimba began to play, tinkly and repetitive, a firework exploded, and Christ danced into the arena - danced and postured with a bleeding painted face, up and down, up and down, grimacing like a prostitute, smiling and suggestive."³⁶

But the whiskey-priest seems unable to repent because he has got beyond despair. "The mystery became too great, a damned man putting God into the mouths of men: an odd sort of servant that, for the devil."³⁷ His death looks like one more failure. "He was held up by two policemen, but you could tell that he was doing his best - it was only that his legs were not fully under his control."³⁸ The whiskey-priest fails throughout his life because of his lack of courage and self-discipline.

In The Heart of the Matter, the key to Scobie's personality is his sense of pity. It is the flaw in Scobie's strength; sentimental pity will drive him to his own destruction, first to professional delinquency, then to adultery, murder and sacrilegious communions, and finally to suicide.

One of the forms which Scobie's pity takes is the comforting lie, which postpones unhappiness by pretending to ignore the truth. He lies to himself by destroying any reminder of worry and pain, even the picture of his own dead

³⁶Ibid., p. 180.

³⁷Ibid., p. 199.

³⁸Ibid., p. 208.

child. " He had cut down his own needs to a minimum, photographs were put away in drawers, the dead were put out of mind : a razor-strop, a pair of rusty handcuffs for decoration : but one still has one's eyes, he thought, one's ears."³⁹ His presence at the death of the child in Pendé is an atonement for his absence from his daughter's death-bed.⁴⁰ It seemed after all that one never really missed a thing. To be a human being one had to drink the cup."⁴⁰ Scobie also lies to his wife in order to put off their mutual misery, and to protect her, although he knows that no one can arrange another's happiness. He dismisses the possibility of improving her or of bringing out her good qualities ; instead he pretends that he still loves her as much as ever and makes a show of satisfying all her immediate demands. She suffers from his pity ; she would have needed strength and real love to develop her true self. As it is, she is aware of the lies and is not even glad at having her passage to South Africa arranged, for in her heart she knows that it is not the best solution of their problem. For a while they speak the truth to each other. " That's your conscience," she said sadly, " your sense of duty. You've never loved anyone since Catherine died."⁴¹ In himself too he is aware of his responsibility in having made her what she is. Like Louise, Helen rebukes Scobie for his pity and comforting lies. " Pity smouldered like decay at his heart He knew from experience how passion died away, and how love went but pity always stayed."⁴² He is bound by " the command to stay, to love, to accept responsibility, to lie."⁴³ More lies become necessary when Louise

³⁹Graham Greene, The Heart of the Matter, p. 39.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 118.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 57.

⁴²Ibid., p. 170.

⁴³Ibid., p. 170.

returns, along with repeated sacrilegious communions, until he feels "his whole personality crumble with the slow disintegration of his."⁴⁴ He is aware that others suffer or die just because he exists ; and his suicide, his last lie, so cunningly concealed from Louise and Helen, is also his last act of pity for those he loves - Louise, Helen and God. His final decision is made in the belief that the only way to spare God from further pain is to destroy himself.

"It seemed to him that he had rotted so far that it was useless to make any effort. God was lodged in his body and his body was corrupting outward from that seed."⁴⁵

Greene's characters are also the victims of time ; they seem to have no control over unexplained events. Pinkie, the whiskey-priest and Scobie are led by fate to their end, "carried like children in a coach through the huge spaces without any knowledge of their destination."⁴⁶ Greene's characters are generally destined to die violent deaths. To all of them the lines by Dryden, quoted as an epigraph to The Power and the Glory, are applicable :

"Th' inclosure narrow'd; the sagacious power
Of hounds and death drew nearer every hour."

Claude-Edmonde Magny comments in her preface to the French translation of Brighton Rock : "Fate is a situation. It is indeed the human situation in the highest sense of the word, since man cannot dissociate himself from his individual predicament."

Destiny seems to strike at any moment, which the victim has no means of foreseeing, and then there is no

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 181.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 214.

⁴⁶Marie Béatrice Mesnet, Graham Greene and the Heart of the Matter, p. 36.

escape from it and no explanation. Andrews in The Man Within wonders: "whether he would ever know peace"; D., in the Confidential Agent knows no respite during his short stay in England. When the dramatic stories of Pinkie, the whiskey-priest and Scobie open, we feel that the pendulum is about to swing. Heavy clouds seem to darken the sky above their heads. And we are aware, as Greene was in The Viper of Milan, of the "sense of doom that lies over success."

This feeling is particularly strong in the case of Pinkie. The grey-eyed Boy, seventeen-year-old leader of Kite's gang, has an extraordinary power over his middle-aged followers. All the brains of the "mob" are concentrated in him: "you take account of most things." Dallow said with admiration.⁴⁷ His cunning and cold-blooded attention to every detail ensure his success; the police are blind to the truth, he controls life and death, his ambition is limitless. This is the moment chosen by destiny as the turning point; its instrument will be Ida, who undertakes to avenge Hale. She moves slowly but with unshaking purpose; nothing can resist her indomitable will. The Boy is more and more closely encircled until he feels his grip loosening and there is no escape left but suicide. His entanglement with Rose, necessary though involuntary, undermines his abnormal strength. Hale's murder, a revenge for Kite's, was the first in a chain of events: Rose seeing the card placed by Spicer under the table-cloth, Spicer's murder, Cubitt's betrayal and finally Dallow's and Ida's interference with Pinkie's project, and Pinkie's suicide - all this within a few weeks; and yet, "if Kite had been there, he would never have got mixed up."⁴⁸

⁴⁷Graham Greene, Brighton Rock, p. 139.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 233.

In The Power and the Glory, the small man, looking like a black question mark, with the "round and hollow face charred with a three-days' beard"⁴⁹ who interrupts Dr. Tench's thoughts turns out to be the last priest left in the state, where he has succeeded in living for ten years, going from village to village, saying Mass in secret : a whiskey-priest, who has gradually surrendered all habits of piety and given way to the 'itch of the flesh' in a moment of despair and drunkenness, but for all this the only one in the whole state through whom God still exists. And suddenly, after his last attempt to escape, the police are informed of his existence. The hunt will start, at first slackly, and reach its climax when the Lieutenant of Police is vested with full power to carry it out. Hitherto we have known the priest only from the out-side ; now we begin to see things from his point of view. Step by step he is reduced to utter abandonment ; all doors are closed to him, as he is hunted down by the Lieutenant and the half-caste traitor who tries to get the price for his head. Twice, however, he escapes from the hands of the Lieutenant of Police, who does not know him, first in the village where his daughter lives, then in the prison of the Capital, when charged with the unlawful carrying of alcohol. It is an irony of fate that he should be allowed to attempt a third escape, which might have been successful, by entering a neighbouring state after a long walk across the mountains. But the enemy is close at his heels and still finds a way to stretch a hand across the border, to call him back to death. Enchained by his priesthood, printed upon him like a birth-mark, the whiskey-priest is led to martyrdom.

In The Heart of the Matter, a squat, grey-haired man walks up the street in front of the hotel, but Wilson cannot tell that this is one

⁴⁹Graham Greene, The Power and The Glory, p. 5.

of those occasions one never forgets. Scobie the Just, the Deputy Commissioner of Police, the only officer trusted by his chief for special missions, admired by his pastor, Father Rank, is one of the few who have resisted the effects of the awful climate. He is even a good loser. Yet he is not liked at the Secretariat, because these very qualities seem to his colleagues to be a continuous personal reproach. We learn at the opening of his story that he will be passed over for promotion to the commissionership. His wife cannot get over this last disappointment and Scobie will be driven to borrow from Yusef, the Syrian, to send her for her health to South Africa. Fate has struck: within a few months, Scobie will be carried down the slippery slope that ends in suicide. Wilson, a special agent sent from London to investigate a case of diamond smuggling, falls in love with Louise. Jealous of Scobie, his wits sharpened by hatred, he scents something wrong in the behaviour of Scobie, who while Louise is away in South Africa falls in love with Helen Rolt. Scobie, watched by Wilson, blackmailed by Yusef, agrees to pass contraband diamonds. When Louise comes back, he cannot choose between the two women; he has to lie and commit sacrilegious communions to keep the truth from his wife and is pushed by Yusef to share responsibility for the murder of his boy, Ali. Hunted by Wilson and sick of giving pain, he sees no other course than suicide. When in the end he is finally chosen for the commissionership, Scobie thinks bitterly: "All this need not have happened. If Louise had stayed I should never have loved Helen: I would never have been blackmailed by Yusef, never have committed the act of despair."⁵⁰

Most of Greene's characters long for peace. This yearning for peace can sometimes disguise the unheroic desire to avoid the effort required to create our true self:

⁵⁰ Graham Greene, The Heart of the Matter, p. 246.

"The renouncement of the personality is one of the ways of seeking deliverance from suffering and evil ... for personality implies pain, and its realization brings suffering. The labour of engendering the personality implies sacrifice, but not the renunciation of the personality."⁵¹

This is where so many people fail ; they oppose an interior inertia to the only real demand made upon them, and by so doing betray themselves and undermine their very freedom. This appears to be the problem of Greene's characters. Their burden becomes so unbearable that they break down from sheer impotence. Instead of responding dynamically to life, they are afraid to commit themselves and accuse fate. They are lost in the end because they believe that there is nothing they can do.

Pinkie is haunted by the idea that his past conditions him ; but it is because he rejects it that it turns out to be ineluctable. Scobie, unable to face the consequences of the vows made years ago in the church at Ealing, finally betrays them. It is not enough to face the present by a choice ; one has to assume the past and all the consequences of this choice ; and Scobie knows this but fails to do it. Like Pinkie, he gives way to despair and the extreme failure, suicide. The future appears to them completed before it is even lived, because of their inability to oppose a dynamic courage to fate.

"There's a proverb, you know, about the end is the beginning. When I was born I was sitting here with you drinking whiskey, knowing ..."⁵²

⁵¹Marie Béatrice Mesnet, Graham Greene and the Heart of the Matter, p. 68.

⁵²Ibid., p. 101.



By this reluctance to act, the constant debate between man's two selves is perverted into a destructive self-consideration. Like Narcissus contemplating his own image, man finds himself shut into "the worst cell of all" himself. Pinkie is so muddled that he is unable even to conceive good. Scobie mistakes the voice of the tempting devil for his duty and can no more draw a line between good and evil in his thoughts than he can in the police cases he has to deal with. The case of the whiskey-priest is different because, however far he may stray, he still carries on and finally answers a mysterious call and is not found wanting. Greene seems to be pointing out the essential human need to involve oneself ; in a sense the priest finds himself when he opens himself to the needs of others.

In their immense desire for peace we recognize the weariness denounced by Bernanos :

"The exhaustion, the dejection, the collection of disgust at the bottom of the soul, the impurity, the defilement Weariness without as within, the immersion of weariness, the sin, the stigma, the curse of weariness, a kind of poisoning of one's being."⁵³

As already mentioned, it is clearly seen that Greene sees man as consisting of two selves : the outer one and the inner one. These two selves are always in conflict. Also Greene sees that man is shaped by his environment. But man's own nature also accounts for his personality. In life, fate plays an important part. As life is horrible, Greene's characters always long for peace. It is obvious that Greene deals openly with the mystery of man's personality.

⁵³Ibid., p. 112.